

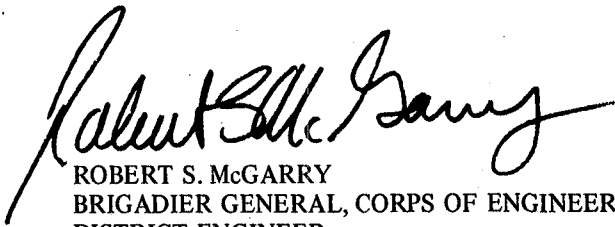
Foreword

In late June 1972, floodwaters resulting from Tropical Storm Agnes caused millions of dollars in damage in the eastern section of the United States. Most of the damage from the storm, called the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States, occurred in parts of Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and New York. Confronted with a massive clean-up and recovery task, state and local officials — particularly in Pennsylvania's hard-hit Susquehanna River Basin — turned to the Federal government for help. The Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) coordinated the Federal response and relied heavily on the Corps of Engineers' proven expertise in disaster relief.

The Corps acted quickly, with an initial effort channeled through existing districts in the North Atlantic Division. In July, as it became clearer that the scope of the clean-up and recovery would be tremendous, Corps officials looked for new ways to meet the growing challenge. The solution was bold. The Corps created a new administrative entity — the Susquehanna Engineer District. To this district went sole responsibility for dealing with work in Pennsylvania and New York under the Disaster Relief Act of 1970. From the begin-

ning the Corps intended that the Susquehanna District be short-lived. The district existed only from 17 July to 15 November 1972, but during that period it carried out missions ranging from debris removal, temporary bridging and mobile home site construction to temporary home repairs. In all, district contracts exceeded \$80 million.

In this study, the author examines the Corps' response to Tropical Storm Agnes, focusing in depth on the formation of the Susquehanna District, its mission performance and its subsequent deactivation. The result is a treatment of value not only to the general reader interested in federal disaster assistance but also to the Corps of Engineers itself. The author concludes that "the Agnes experience demonstrated . . . that each disaster has a character all its own, that no single response is possible, and that the federal agencies fighting the disaster must have flexibility." The Susquehanna District experiment is viewed not as a model for future action but as a timely response to a unique situation. Still, the lessons learned in the Agnes disaster can be fruitfully applied in planning for other emergency operations.



ROBERT S. MCGARRY
BRIGADIER GENERAL, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
DISTRICT ENGINEER